THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • MONDAY • JANUARY 01, 2024 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 18 • LATE CITY EDITION

The New Indian Express wishes its readers a

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2024

U.S. SHOOTS DOWN TWO BALLISTIC MISSILES OF HOUTHIS IN RED SEA

The US on Sunday said it shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired towards a container ship by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea

FORCES FOIL BID TO HIJACK SHIP, KILL REBELS

Hours later, four boats tried to attack the same ship, but US forces opened fire, killing several of the armed crews, the US Central Command said. No one was injured on the ship. The Singapore-flagged MAERSK HANZGHOU reported they had already been hit by a missile Saturday night while transiting the Southern Red Sea and requested assistance, the US said

U.S. NAVY SINKS THREE BOATS OF INSURGENTS

- The US Navy helicopters sank three of the four boats, killing the crew while the fourth boat fled the area, US Central Command said, and no damage to US personnel or equipment was reported
- The Iran-backed Houthis claim they are targeting only ships with Israeli links and the aim is to end Israel's deadly assault on Gaza | P11

FIVE

WARSHIPS FROM THE U.S., FRANCE, AND U.K. ARE PATROLLING THE RED SEA

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

WELCOME 2024

Hundreds of revellers welcome the New Year on Brigade Road in Bengaluru on Sunday | SHASHIDHAR BYRAPPA | P2

Navy on high alert after ship attacks

Warships, missile destroyers, and surveillance aircraft deployed in Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

WITH the dramatic rise in targeted attacks on merchant vessels transiting through international shipping lanes in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Central / North Arabian Sea, the Indian Navy has beefed up maritime surveillance. Warships and surveillance aircraft have been deployed in view of the heightened threat perception, Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said on Sunday.

The development comes after back-to-back attacks on merchant vessels. On December 23, MV Chem Pluto carrying 20 Indian crew members was hit by a drone off India's west coast. On the same day, MV Sai Baba, which was on its way to India came under a suspected drone strike in the Southern Red Sea. Earlier, merchant ship MV Ruen was hijacked and taken to the territorial waters of Somalia.

"Task groups comprising destroyers and frigates have been deployed to undertake maritime security operations and render assistance to merchant vessels in case of any incident. Aerial surveillance by long-range maritime patrol aircraft and RPAs (remotely piloted aircraft) has been enhanced to have complete maritime domain awareness," Madhval said.

The deployment into the Arabian Sea includes Navy's missile destroyers INS Kolkata, INS Kochi, INS Mormugao, INS Chennai, and INS Visakhapatnam.

INS Kolkata is deployed on the mouth of the Red Sea; INS Kochi in south of Yemen Socotra Island; INS Mormugao in west Arabian sea; and INS Chennai in Central Arabian sea. INS Visakhapatnam was moved in early this week and was tasked to patrol the north Arabian Sea.

The Indian Navy has also deployed Boeing-made P8I multi-mission aircraft along with long endurance Sea Guardian drone to constantly survey the vessels in Arabian Sea and up to Gulf of Aden to identify suspicious ships.

These assets have been pressed into service to keep the sea lanes of communication between Bab el-Mandeb to Indian coast safe for merchant shipping and missile attack taking place in West Asia.

EXPRESS READ

ISRO's polarimetry mission launch today

Bengaluru: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is geared up to launch India's first dedicated polarimetry mission to study black holes and neutron stars on Monday. The countdown for XPoSat (X-ray Polarimeter Satellite) began at the SDSC-SHAR, Sriharikota, on Sunday | P7

Pratap Simha's bro gets bail in tree-felling case

Hassan: Vikram Simha, brother of Kodagu-Mysuru MP Pratap Simha, was granted bail by the Belur JMFC on Sunday, in a case of alleged felling of 125 trees on revenue land in Belur taluk of Hassan district recently. After getting bail, he said his arrest is politically motivated | P4

Gifts from Sita's birthplace to reach Ayodhya on Jan 6

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

DAYS before the consecration of the Ram Temple on January 22, a 500-member procession, carrying 1,100 *bhars* (baskets) of items meant as wedding gifts for Lord Ram will reach Ayodhya from Nepal's Janakpur, the birthplace of his bride Sita.

The procession will start from Janaki Mandir in Janakpur on January 4 and is expected to reach Ayodhya two days later on January 6.

"The *bhars* will contain lots of wedding gifts including jewellery, gold and silver items, dry fruits, utensils, garments, cosmetics and quintals of food grains like rice – all of which we traditionally give as gifts to a bride when she gets married and goes to live with her groom. Since Sita was from Janakpur, we will carry all this to Ayodhya as an offering to Lord Rama on January 6, which will be ahead of the consecration of Ram Temple on January 22," Lalit Shah, a member of the Janakpurdhamash Ayodhyadham Bhar Yatra, a committee which is organising the visit, told this newspaper.

The local authorities in Ayodhya have made arrangements to accommodate 251 people who are part of the procession. Arrangements are being made by the organising committee to accommodate the rest at various private facilities.

The distance between Janakpur and Ayodhya is 458 km.

"We will begin our journey from Janaki Mandir, and then, via Jaleshwar, reach Birganj where we will rest for the night. Around 30 cars and five buses will be part of the procession that will carry these gifts. On January 5, we will enter India via Raxaul and have lunch at Betia. Then via Gorakpur and Bastipur we will reach Ayodhya," said Shah. At 8 am on January 6, the delegation will hand over the 1,100 *bhars* to the trustees of the temple.

Panagariya appointed Finance Commn chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

FORMER vice-chairman of Niti Aayog Arvind Panagariya was on Sunday appointed chairman of the 16th Finance Commission. Panagariya was the first vice-chairman of the government's policy think-tank and he held the position from January 2015 to August 2017, when he resigned.

As a chairman of the finance commission, Panagariya will have the difficult task of formulating a revenue-sharing model amid the growing chasm between the northern and the southern states. The latter have been complaining of getting very little from the Centre's divisible tax pool due to the poor performance of northern states such as Bihar.

Ritvik Ranjanam Pandey, joint secretary in the Union finance ministry, has been appointed secretary to the Commission. The other members will be notified separately.

The Finance Commission is expected to present its comprehensive report by October 31, 2025, covering a period of five years commencing from April 1, 2026.

MHA declares Tehreek-e-Hurriyat as 'unlawful assn'

Follow the money

Several associates of TeH have been chargesheeted by the NIA for raising money to support terror in Kashmir including Geelani's son in law

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

THE Ministry of Home Affairs on Sunday declared the 'Tehreek-e-Hurriyat' (TeH), Jammu and Kashmir, as "unlawful association" for the next five years with immediate effect, saying it was involved in activities to separate J&K from India and to establish Islamic rule.

"The outfit has been found spreading anti-India propaganda and continuing terror activities to fuel and fan secessionism in J &K," Home Minister Amit Shah said. The government has adopted zero tolerance policy against terrorism, any individual or organisation involved in anti-India activities and agendas, he added.

Three days ago, the Centre declared a faction led by Masarat Alam, 'unlawful association' for the next five years.

TeH was founded by the late separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani in 2004. Many criminal cases have been registered against TeH for its anti-India messaging and efforts to sustain terrorism, Shah said.

MHA, in a notification, highlighted the group's involvement in raising funds from various sources including Pakistan to sustain terrorist acts and orchestrating stone-pelting against security forces. The MHA has pointed out the outfit's disregard for constitutional authority by its repeated calls to boycott elections.

Class 8 girl's project helps save stream

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Madikeri

AN honest effort from an eighth grade girl of the government school at Kodagarahalli of Suntikoppa in Kodagu district has helped preserve a local stream.

The work for her science project has now earned the respect of the district administration and district police, who have ordered that CCTV cameras be installed to prevent dumping of waste near the stream.

Shreesha AS, daughter of Suntikoppa residents Shiju and Sandhya, is a student of the Kodagarahalli Suntikoppa Nadu Government High School. She was nominated to represent the school at the 31st National Children's Science Convention, where she won the 'Young Scientist' recognition for her presentation – 'Pollution across river banks'.

While a majority of science projects are done using the internet, Shreesha went a step ahead, and did a real world project. With the help from her father, she visited the stream near her locality to collect inputs for her project. She surveyed the Haraduru stream, collected details about its importance to the locality. She recorded sound bytes from local residents and learnt that the stream has been the lifeline of the locality for ages. P7

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